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The Liverpool Biennale September 2002

Seamus Kealy

One never knows beforehand what will happen when Gelatin mounts a project. In fact, this curious, Austrian collective never knows what will happen either. Then again, piecing together the puzzle of what the infamous "armpit" installation was is another question.

The four bed-headed, unshaven troopers arrived in Liverpool two weeks before the Biennale's opening and began to search for a venue for their ambivalent project, which at the time consisted of a several day program of musical acts. Four days before the Biennale's opening, they had built a small performance bunker from dumpster materials - complete with a tiny stage, pissoirs, carpeted seating, a bar – all within an abandoned loading dock warehouse.

By word of mouth over a thousand people came into "armpit" until it was closed down decisively by a fire inspector, fittingly, on day four. Those who entered armpit were immediately within the throes of an ongoing, orgiastic program including Brazilian karaoke, "banana madness", kissing-games, darkroom photography, a naturally-induced sauna, strip shows, a Miss Liverpool Biennale 2002 contest, and most notably, "ball-dancing". This act demanded that men don women's swimming suits with a crotch-hole, thereby exposing the aforementioned organs.

Consistently high density, up to 300 participants had to slide through a mass of wet bodies, encountering the pleasantries and unpleasantries of the odours, sweat and misgivings of the other inhabitants. For Gelatin, the importance of armpit was to break down barriers usually set in regards to the body. This collapse of boundaries was unavoidable upon entry. In the same moment there was a particular direction to the entire project. Essentially, Gelatin formed an intensely intimate micro-community of Liverpool locals and Biennale participants, a "machine of bodies" engaged in various acts. But the Gelatin members all insist that despite the chaos that took place in armpit, there was always a sense of coherence, "like the energy that thrives within a neon tube".

Armpit was off-site and ended before the Biennale's opening, thus it deliberately denied its own situation in the biennale while officially being a part of it. Typically, the four members claim, occasions like the biennale are not so much about the artwork exhibited, but more about the networking and schmoozing between curators, writers, artists, dealers and buyers. This activity is about reinforcing power relationships in the art world, not about engaging with art. Armpit contradicted this dynamic and in doing so affirmed often neglected principles that artwork may espouse (like creating a Situational experience, or embracing the base), but principles that are often contaminated within the context of a major, hegemonic art exhibition. Often invited by unassuming curators, Gelatin's projects cause both mayhem and revelry, but mostly the latter.

Essentially, Gelatin assert an active, obscene idealism that mocks the semblances of contemporary life. This inevitably involves parodying the hierarchal and capitalist model that tends to structure the art world, but in a manner that unites individuals and champions what Hal Foster has described as a return to the real.

Pending on funding, their next idea is to float aimlessly in the ocean within a concrete iceberg. We'll see what comes their way.